

# STARTING A WALKING GROUP

Thank you for your interest in promoting healthy lifestyles in your community! This Do-It-Yourself kit gives you information and easy ideas on how to start a walking group. Let's get started!

## 50+ EXERCISE: THE FACTS

A brisk, half-hour walk five or more days a week can reduce the risk of developing:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis
- Some cancers

The 30-minute daily walking routine also boosts brain power, helps control weight, requires only modest investments of time and money, increases productivity and — because of its benefits, promoting alertness and health — a walking regimen may lead to reduced health care costs. At a rate of 74%, AARP members who are active say that walking is their most regular type of exercise.

Research shows that walking itself promotes physical activity. Since walking is also an “entry-level” form of exercise — i.e., people who develop daily walking routines are likely to eventually practice yoga, go biking or join in other athletic pursuits — AARP believes walking programs are the first step to push greater numbers of 50+ Americans to keep fit.

So if starting a walking group doesn't sound like a volunteer activity to you, think again. Your efforts can have a tremendous impact on the health and well-being of your community. Alternatively, you may choose to keep your act of service small by asking a friend or neighbor to walk with you on a regular basis. Even this one simple act can make a world of difference. So don't wait — get walking!

This kit was produced in cooperation with The Corporation for National and Community Service. Find more online tool kits at [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov). Share your experiences with this activity and find other ways to help in your community at [CreateTheGood.org](http://CreateTheGood.org).



## GETTING STARTED

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a group with your friends and neighbors to share the effort.
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals.
- Celebrate your successes together.

**The Challenge:** Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized independently run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

A step-by-step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows. Please let us know how your project goes and what you learn by telling your story at [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).

## STEP ONE: IDENTIFY LOCAL PARTNERS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your area. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions.

- Call your local community senior center and ask how volunteers can help with summer programming.
- Review the “Guide to Finding Local Partners.”
- Ask the existing organizations if they’d like to invite their members to join your walking team.

## STEP TWO: BUILD A TEAM

Teams can help support and motivate members and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors and faith group members to walk with you.

- Host a house meeting or potluck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers and plan next steps.
- Consider recruiting new members of your walking group online at [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).

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- Important note: safety first. Convey to group members and in promotional materials that people with doubts about participating should check with their doctors. In addition, you may wish to share an easy screening tool with participants. Find a tool with six simple questions at <http://easyforyou.info>.

### STEP THREE: SET A GOAL

Review “A Goal-Setting Guide.” Set a goal for a period of time (e.g., 10 weeks) and hold yourself accountable. Commit as individuals and as a team to a walking program. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You’ll be surprised at how much you can do when you commit, focus and follow through.

### STEP FOUR: START WALKING

Review “Tips for Starting a Walking Group.” Planning is key. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you get started.

### STEP FIVE: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

- After every event, thank your volunteers and participants, sign them up for the next event and ask them to commit to inviting a friend to the next event.
- Share your story and results: Your team members, the community and CreateTheGood.org visitors want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Tell about your successes and what you have learned at [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).

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## FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS: 50+ WALKING GROUPS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your community. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions. Get plugged in with them!

There are many ways to find local partners for walking teams. You could start a walking team within an existing group you are part of. If you'd like to reach out to invite others to join you, consider calling your local senior center, YMCA, YWCA, community center or parks and recreation department.

A few phone calls can produce all the information you need to know your options.

### SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT:

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm interested in starting a walking group program in the community.

- Is there a way I can promote the walking group at your center?
- Are there existing groups of seniors or others I could get the word to?
- What would be the best way to do that?
- If we wanted to use your facility as a meeting place for a kickoff meeting, who would I talk to about that?
- Do you have any other suggestions of community organizations I could contact to promote the walking group?

## SETTING GOALS

Setting goals and having a plan to meet them will help you form and maintain your walking group. Plan to get together as a group once a week to keep your group motivated and to ask them to report their progress.

These three easy yet very important steps will help with goal setting. Ask group members to:

1. Set a start date. If you're truly ready, don't wait! Take advantage of your enthusiasm and keep that momentum going. Pick a start date and record it on the Personal Action Plan.
2. Tell friends and family. You need support, and the people who care about you can provide it. Telling others about your plan also reinforces your commitment to yourself.

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3. Write down your goals. Think about your goals and what you must do to meet them. Make sure to prioritize your new commitment to being active among your other activities. Consider what adjustments you'll need to make in your schedule to make walking a priority.

*What will you do to help your walkers stay motivated?*

### SET CONCRETE GOALS

Setting goals helps you be accountable to yourself and also increases accountability within a group. Clear goals at the beginning of a project will also help you determine how your project will work and what role group members can play. Once goals are set, you can track your progress, compare your results with other group members and figure out what works best so everyone can meet (or exceed) their goals.

Set a service goal for a period of time (e.g., 10 weeks) and hold yourself accountable. Commit as an individual and as a group to increase healthy exercise habits together. Then keep your commitment. Let's see what we can do together!

- We will walk \_\_\_\_\_ minutes a day.
- We will walk \_\_\_\_\_ days a week.
- We will walk \_\_\_\_\_ steps a day.
- We will increase our steps walked per day by \_\_\_\_\_ percent.

Part of setting good outcome goals is thinking about how you will achieve them. As a group or an individual, think about process-based goals and map out how you will hit your goals above.

- We will start walking on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).
- As a team, we will recruit \_\_\_\_\_ walkers to join us.
- As an individual, I will recruit \_\_\_\_\_ people to join me.

### TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

- Set a weekly or biweekly deadline to report progress. For example, "Our group will report progress every Friday. The person responsible for reporting results for your team is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Make sure every group member is in the loop. Designate a group member to track and share the results. For example, "Our group will share our progress with all members by email/phone calls every week. The person responsible for sharing progress is \_\_\_\_\_."

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- Keep track of your progress. Score sheets like the one below can be helpful.

Week	# of minutes walked	# of steps taken	# of additional walkers recruited
Week 1			
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			
Week 5			
Week 6			
Week 7			
Week 8			
Week 9			
Week 10			
Total			

### TIPS: STARTING A WALKING TEAM

Walking with seniors can be as simple as partnering with your local senior center for one-on-one walking or building a large community team.

Calling all walkers: Starting a walking group needn't take much time or effort. Here's what you need to do:

Advertise: Post flyers in your local library, recreation, community center, senior center, health club, cafeteria at work or place of worship. Take advantage of free calendar listings in

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local newspapers or newsletters. The flyers should invite interested walkers to a meeting and give people a day, time and place. Choose a public meeting place like the library or neighborhood coffee shop. You also could include an email or telephone number for people to contact you. Consider posting your walk times on [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).

Hold a meeting: At your first meeting, listen to what the group has to say. Then decide together:

- How many times a week the group will walk
- Where you will walk
- What time you will meet and how far you will go

You might want to scope and map out several different routes. You can increase the distance as you go along.

You'll also want to set some guidelines:

- Will you walk if it's raining or snowing?
- Does the group want to walk both indoors and outdoors?
- Do you want to ban cell phones and headphones during walks?
- Do you want to have regular meetings?
- Will members call one another if someone can't make it, or will the group just walk with whoever shows up? You can make the group as formal or informal as you like.

Other things you might want to discuss include dressing for the weather, warming up and cooling down and recording and tracking progress.

Finally, demonstrate proper walking techniques: arms swinging, chest high, stomach in, back straight and rolling from heel to toe on both feet.

Before the meeting ends, create a telephone tree so team members can contact each other. Include email addresses.

Get organized: Once your team is up and walking, you might want to get more organized. Here are some of the things you can do:

- Give your team a name and have T-shirts or visors made.
- Elect officers.
- Enter charity walkathons, community parades or 5K races together.

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- Have coffee or lunch after your walks. Spin off a dinner club or book club. Organize an all-day or weekend walk to explore a new place (a historic site, big city, part of the Appalachian Trail).
- Start a newsletter.
- Organize a community walk to get others interested in walking. You can partner with a local hospital or other community organization to increase support and participation.

These kinds of activities can help your team stay interested and motivated. Motivation might start to dwindle over time, but this is normal. People often find that one of the biggest challenges they face with any fitness program is sticking with it over the long haul.

### STAYING MOTIVATED

If your team decides to hold occasional or regular meetings, you can turn them into opportunities to motivate yourselves and each other by:

- Inviting a local speaker to talk about fitness and healthy eating
- Finding and sharing articles or websites on walking and sample walking logs to record progress
- Setting weight-loss goals
- Sharing success stories
- Recognizing group members who have lost weight or improved their health by walking
- Making a list of all the benefits of walking and posting and reviewing them at each meeting. Mention that walking can reduce stress, help prevent heart disease, improve sleep and help you maintain or lose weight.

Remember that your continued enthusiasm as the team's leader is very important. Talk about how walking has improved your life. Encourage interested members and welcome new walkers. And most of all, be a role model by being a committed walker.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### **AARP 10-WEEK WALKING PROGRAM, Program Coordinator's Guide**

This 10-week walking program model begins with a kickoff event where participants gather to get fired up to commit to increasing the amount they walk for 10 weeks. The kickoff includes educational presentations on setting goals, how to walk the right way, how to wear a step counter, etc.

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Motivation tips and fun ideas such as scavenger hunts and a 10-week celebration event are also included. [www.aarp.org/walking](http://www.aarp.org/walking)

### **AARP Step Up to Better Health**

Inspiring program helps you increase the number of steps you take each day, no matter how active you are now. [www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com](http://www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com)

### **AARP Get Fit on Route 66**

Fun, nostalgic trip down America's most famous highway lets you choose from 66 activities, including walking. Visit the Route 66 Diner for recipes or try the Backseat Driver feature where friends can opt in to see each other's progress. [www.aarp.getfitonroute66.com](http://www.aarp.getfitonroute66.com)

### **AARP Staying Motivated**

A variety of AARP articles help you keep walking. [www.aarp.org/walking](http://www.aarp.org/walking)

### **Rails-To-Trails**

Walk, run or cycle your way to better health and fitness on the nation's network of 1,200 community rail trails. Find a trail near you. [www.trailink.com](http://www.trailink.com)

### **Sierra Club**

The Sierra Club has group outings that include day hikes, bird-watching trips, canal walks, peak scrambles and forays into natural areas of major urban regions. [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

### **American Volkssport Association**

Find walking events, clubs, workshops and special programs. The group's network of 450 clubs organizes more than 3,000 noncompetitive walking events each year in all 50 states. [www.ava.org](http://www.ava.org)

### **WalkSport**

Information on mall-walking programs. [www.walksport.com](http://www.walksport.com)

### **The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC)**

PBIC is a national clearinghouse with information on how to get involved in making your community more walkable and ideas for promoting walking at work and in the community. [www.walkinginfo.org](http://www.walkinginfo.org)

### **Books**

*Walking for Fun and Fitness* by Jerald D. Hawkins and Sandra M. Hawkins, Wadsworth, December 2000

*Walking Magazine The Complete Guide To Walking: for Health, Fitness, and Weight Loss* by Mark Fenton, The Lyons Press, February 20

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